


WIDE AWAKES
KIDNAPING MARCHING CLUES

DRAWER 9

CAMPAIGN - 1860

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Abraham Lincoln's Political Career through 1860

Wide Awakes

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

POLITICAL CLUBS SHOULD BE DISBANDED.

Mr. Editor: For one I observe with pleasure that in many quarters the attempts to give permanence to the organization of the various political associations, called into existence by the exigencies of the late exciting Presidential canvass, are not meeting with success. In Philadelphia, for instance, where an attempt was recently made to consolidate the Wide Awake Clubs of that city under one head, in credence of the chimerical idea that it will be necessary to assist the President elect to the executive chair, the proposition met, as it ought everywhere, with signal defeat. To my mind, the adoption of such measures would be the readiest way of proving that the fire-eaters, who talk so glibly of disunion, secession, and total annihilation, so to speak, are regarded as sane and responsible agents, in which light I believe no sensible citizen and patriot does view them. Once let the alarmists of any section of our country—and they appear to be numerous at the North—know that they have occasioned a fright, and their aim is accomplished; they are happy, and willing to subside.

Except in some instances where it is the intention of the club to visit Washington on the fourth of March, as peaceable citizens, to assist in the ceremonies incident to the day, and on their return to disband, it appears to me that if these associations have a future after the idea upon which they were originally founded—the advancement of claims of a favorite candidate—has ceased to exist, it can be simply and only on the undisguised premises that their rooms may be used as a place of resort for idlers and loungers, or if not at the outset, will eventually become so, having no definite idea to hold them together; which sort of rendezvous I hold are always pernicious, as tending to detract from home influence and the social ties and associations of a literary and benevolent nature with which we are surrounded; greatly so in this instance, from the fact of the club being composed principally of the young, impulsive and prone to be injudicious portion of our community.

Look to it, good companions of the torch, twelve mile tramps, and sore throat in the morning, that we have no more permanent organizations of this sort, for my word for it, in two months no party would wish to own them as their offspring.

WIDE AWAKE.

MR. LINCOLN CALLED THEM WIDE-AWAKES

A Republican Club in Hartford So Designated by Him in 1860.

From The Independent.

It was on a train that was two hours late that Mr. Lincoln came to the Charter Oak City in the early evening of March 5, 1860. A meeting at which he was to deliver the main speech was due to open in a scanty fifteen minutes. Without a thought of solace for the inner man the hardy railsplitter stepped into one of the crazy "public carriages" of the Hartford of 1860 and bade the jehu to sprint for the old City Hall, in which the meeting was to be held.

A large crowd had collected in the building. In it was a larger infusion of young men than was usually the case in antebellum political assemblies. The President of the meeting was but twenty-nine, but he combined with natural coolness solid qualities which are possessed by few men who have the experience of twice twenty-nine years. He was George G. Sill, since then Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut. In introducing the gaunt ex-frontiersman, Mr. Sill referred to him as "one who has done yeoman service for the young party," with a slight emphasis on the word "yeoman," sufficient to remind his auditors of the democratic birth and unpretentious appearance of Tom Lincoln's son. This happy stroke, made as it was with the delicacy of the rapier rather than with the emphasis of the bludgeon, caught the fancy of the crowd. It was probably with it in mind that Mr. Lincoln, in a few words preliminary to his address, after explaining the cause of his delay, styled himself a "dirty-shirt" exponent of Republicanism. His gaunt, homely figure, unpretending manner, conversational air, careless clothing, and dry humor made him at once a favorite with the audience, who felt that he was indeed a man of the people.

Mr. Lincoln's speech was meaty, logical, convincing. It dealt largely with the question of slavery.

After the meeting was over Mr. Lincoln, escorted by Mr. Sill, entered an open carriage. Several hundred young men closed in around the vehicle, and, forming spontaneously in military ranks, accompanied the vehicle in progress to the house of Mayor Timothy M. Allyn. They saluted their favorite with storm after storm of enthusiastic cheers.

Turning to Mr. Sill, Mr. Lincoln said, humorously: "The boys are wide awake. Suppose we call them the 'Wide-awakes.'"

His suggestion was followed. A few days later a marching Republican club was formed, and its originators gave to it simply the name "The Wide-awakes." Other marching clubs followed fast and thick in its wake. To each one, as it was christened, was given the name "Wide-awake;" and from Stonington to Salisbury, Connecticut was fairly speckled with "Wide-awake clubs."

At Mayor Allyn's fine old colonial mansion a baker's dozen sat down to dine. Champagne was served at the meal; but Mr. Lincoln, with one of his humorous smiles, politely declined to indulge.

The following morning was raw and gusty; but bad atmospheric conditions had no effect on Lincoln, who early in the forenoon took a stroll through the city. On his return he stepped into the bookstore of Brown & Gross, on the corner of Main and Asylum Streets. The little establishment was one of the oldest as well as one of the best in New-England outside of Boston. In it Mr. Lincoln met for the first time his future Secretary of the Navy. The two spent two hours exchanging political and economic views. This interview may fairly be said to have led to the offer of the navy portfolio, some eight or nine months later, to Mr. Welles. Testimony to this effect was given, shortly after his inauguration by President Lincoln.

THE WIDE AWAKE CLUBS.

Origin of the Organizations That Assisted to Elect Lincoln.

Two Republicans had a dispute yesterday evening in a hotel as to the origin of the "Wide Awake" clubs that were organized in 1860 to help elect Lincoln to be President. One said that the first club was organized in New Haven, and the other thought that Providence, R. I., was entitled to the honor. At this moment a tall, fine-looking man, with a military carriage, walked by, and one of the Republicans exclaimed: "There goes the man who helped to organize the first club; he can settle the question."

Col. E. S. Yergason of Hartford, who was alluded to, paused and related a few historical facts. In the first place, the Colonel is not a Norwegian, nor a Dane, although his name indicates that he might be a foreigner. His ancestors fought in the Revolutionary war, and the Colonel shouldered a musket and served gallantly through the civil war. "Five of us," he said, "started the first Wide Awake club in Hartford, and the way it all came about was as follows: On Feb. 25, 1860, the spring campaign was opened with a meeting in Touro Hall, formerly the North Baptist Church, where a large audience gathered to hear Cassius M. Clay of Kentucky. A torchlight procession was arranged to escort the speaker to his quarters at the Allyn House, and George P. Bissell acted as marshal, wearing his famous white hat of the Fremont campaign four years previous.

"The old torches were leaky, and five young men, myself included, got cambrie from a store and made capes of them to keep the oil drippings from our shoulders. The picturesqueness of our 'rig' attracted the attention of Marshal Bissell, and he placed us at the head of the procession. Afterward, March 3, a meeting was called, and we soon organized as 'Wide Awakes.' Before the campaign was finished there were thousands of Wide Awake clubs all over the country. I have the cape yet that I wore more than thirty-seven years ago. I am proud that I was a Wide Awake and helped to start the movement which resulted in Lincoln's election."

LINCOLN WIDE-AWAKES IN 1860

1865

One of the peculiar introductions into the first Lincoln political campaign was the Wide Awake marching clubs, which, it has been claimed, went very far toward winning for him the election. These political marching bodies met with so much success that the custom was continued for more than a score of years thereafter, says the Philadelphia Press.

The uniform of the Wide Awakes consisted of a cap and a large cape of enameled cloth, and each one carried a torch. The capes were of a variety of colors, and naturally a procession of Wide Awakes was picturesque and striking. Many of the clubs had "Wide Awakes" stamped upon the capes as well as other insignia. The torch was a small tin fount with a burner and a wick for kerosene fastened to a stick about the size and length of a broom stick. Toward the end of this campaign a few companies came out with a swing torch.

The Wide Awakes were carefully drilled by their captains, and many of them on parades would go through intricate evolutions. These clubs were organized all over the country, and if an outlying town or village had a procession or flag raising the clubs of the vicinity were supposed to turn out and frequently marched several miles in doing so. It has been estimated that there were more than 2,000,000 voters in duly organized Wide Awake clubs.

Some historians have made the assertion that it was the Wide Awakes that elected Lincoln, and this is probably not very far from the truth. The movement seemed to be spontaneous outbursts of the people from one end

of the North to the other. Every town village and city had its company of Wide Awakes, marching, drilling and maneuvering.

The Wide Awakes organization grew out of the first campaign meeting in Hartford, Conn., on February 25, 1860—the state election campaign. Hon. Cassius M. Clay was the speaker, and after the meeting was escorted to the Allyn House by a torchlight parade. Two of the young men who were to carry torches—D. G. Francis and H. P. Blair—being dry goods clerks, in order to protect their clothing from dust and oil liable to fall from the torches, had prepared capes of black cambric, which they wore in connection with the glazed caps commonly worn at the time.

Col. George P. Bissell, who was marshal, noticed the uniform, put the wearers in front, where the novelty of the rig and its double advantage of utility and show attracted. It was proposed at once to form a campaign club of fifty torch bearers, with glazed caps and oilcloth capes instead of cambric. A meeting to organize formally was appointed March 6, but before the new uniforms were ready Abraham Lincoln addressed a meeting in Hartford on the evening of March 5. After his speech the cap wearers of the previous meeting, with a number of others who had secured their uniforms, escorted Mr. Lincoln to the hotel.

The club was definitely organized on the following night. Just one year thereafter this club attended the inauguration of Lincoln in a body. The Wide Awakes were organized by both political parties in later campaigns.

6. AN ELECTION PARADE. The results of the Election gave Lincoln and Hamlin 180 electoral votes, Breckenridge and Lane 72, Bell and Everett 39, Douglas and Johnson 12. The Picture from Harper's Weekly for 13 Oct. 1860, shows a procession of the "Wide Awakes," a Lincoln Campaign Club.

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The Election Parade

law gave him special privileges in relation to an extended period of service, a law entitling Worden to fifty-five years of active service. However, he retired with the highest sea-pay of his grade, at his own request, on December 23, 1886.

Worden was a brave and competent officer, but not necessarily a brilliant one. Lady Luck (or President Lincoln) seemed to have been with him in the way of special assignments and promotions. Perhaps his assignment of the command of the *Monitor* came to him because the older officers of the Navy had no desire to command the "cheese box on a raft" or "a tin can on a shingle" which started the forty-four year old lieutenant on the road to fame. Little did old "wooden wall" officers realize that a reputation could be built on the half-submerged deck of that "absurd monstrosity" of John Ericsson's.

The Wide Awakes And Their Torch Light Parades

To promote the Presidential candidacy of Abraham Lincoln during the political campaign of 1860 there were developed marching organizations called the Wide Awakes. The members marched at night carrying flaming torches, colored lanterns, banners, flags and transparencies much the same way as floats are used today. Such parades served as entertainment in the communities, large or small, when other types of diversion were unknown. Along the route of the parade streamers were hung across the streets and the buildings, and everyone and everything was gayly decorated. These celebrations, held largely in the North, did much to advertise the candidate, in addition to entertaining the spectator.

The first Wide Awake Club was organized in Hartford, Connecticut on Saturday, March 3, 1860 when a group of thirty-six young men met in a club room over Buck's Drug Store on Main Street, one door north of the Phoenix Bank. They adopted a Constitution, and each member was to provide at his own expense "a glazed cap and cape," and to pay a fee of seventy-five cents which would allow him the use of a campaign torch. J. Doyle De Witt, in his 15 page pamphlet "Lincoln In Hartford" has provided a detailed account of the origin and purpose of the Wide Awakes.

The first officers of the Hartford Wide Awakes were James S. Chalker, Captain; H. T. Sperry, 1st Aid and Corresponding Secretary; and C. V. R. Pond, Recording Secretary and Captain's Aid. The objective of the newly formed organization proved popular and within a few weeks the membership was increased to "several hundred" and on July 27, over "two thousand" Wide Awakes from Hartford and from other cities, some as far away as Newark, marched in the streets of Hartford in a torchlight parade. Meanwhile, Republican organizations all over the country adopted the name "Wide Awakes" and a potent political force was created almost spontaneously.

The campaign torches burned a coal-oil or low grade kerosene, and as they continually dripped when in use, the marchers wore oil cloth capes to protect their clothing. These capes also served as rain capes during inclement weather. At first these capes were nondescript, but eventually they became colorful uniforms. Then, too, enterprising manufacturers made available to the marchers many types of torches with varying descriptions in newspaper advertisement of the merits of their products. However, many of the torches were home-made.

At times, some of the groups taking part in the torchlight processions were hired marchers who were paid as much as \$2.00 per person for one parade, and they were not necessarily loyal to any political party. Other paraders were sometimes highly trained and could execute a manual of arms with their rifle torches, similar to military marching groups. These parades would often last two or three hours. The custom of using torchlight groups in political parades prevailed until the late 19th century.

In the 1860 campaign, the marchers did more than march; they sang campaign songs and shouted political slogans. A popular number often sung during a parade was the "Wide Awake Rallying Song":

Wide Awake Rallying Song

Tune—"Nelly Bly."

Wide awake! wide awake! this is no time for sleep,
Let every friend of Freedom his weary vigil keep;
The foe is on his march again, his council fires aglow,
Then rally now, my gallant boys, to battle with the foe.

Chorus—Wide awake! wide awake!

Let us our torches take,
And show the foes of Freedom, boys,
That we are wide awake.

Wide awake! wide awake! there's no such word as fail,
The omens of our triumph, boys, are borne on every gale;
From East to West, through all the land where Freedom
yet holds sway,

The shouts of Freedom's conquering hosts still cheer us
on our way.

Chorus—Wide awake! wide awake! etc.

Wide awake! wide awake! the foe is on his way,
There is no time for slumber, if we would win the day;
Our cause is just, our hearts are firm, and fixed on truth
and right,

If we keep wide awake, boys, we'll put our foes to flight.

Chorus—Wide awake! wide awake! etc.

Wide awake! wide awake! the stars with loving light
Look down upon our gallant band who battle for the right;
We bear no weapons in our hands, our motto's "Love to
man,"

And Freedom, peace, and happiness, still follow in our
van.

Chorus—Wide awake! wide awake! etc.

A "Grand Procession of Wide Awakes" at New York



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

This eagle torch (recently acquired by the Lincoln Library-Museum) is believed to have been used in the 1860 Presidential campaign by the Republican Wide Awakes. The torch burned a low grade of coal oil and was supported on a pole by loops under each wing, with wick openings on top of each wing. The wick openings on this torch have been converted from single burners to double burners. Examples of this type of torch are found in the Detroit Historical Society and in the J. Doyle DeWitt Collection of Hartford, Conn. See Political Campaign Torches by Herbert R. Collins, Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Obverse and reverse of bronze medal commemorating the organization of the Hartford Wide Awakes on March 3, 1860.

City on the evening of October 3, 1860 was reported in *Harper's Weekly* on October 13th:

"Thousands (estimated at 20,000) of torches flashing in high, narrow streets, crowded with eager people, and upon house-fronts in which every window swarms with human faces; with the mingling music of scores of military bands, and the rippling, running, sweeping, and surging sound of huzzas from tens of thousands, but generally a silence like the quiet flow of a vast river; with the waving of banners and moving transparencies of endless device; and through all, out of all, and over all, the splendor of exploding fire-works, of every color—these combined, at night, are an imposing spectacle; and these everyone in the city saw at the Wide-Awake festival on Wednesday night.

"It was certainly the nearest approach to a purely

poetic popular demonstration that we have had. Torches have no dangerous antecedents. Fireworks are of no party. Splendor and beauty are not yet prescribed. Every man who has at heart the municipal honor or New York (municipal honor?) must have been glad and gratified on Wednesday evening. There was never, perhaps, so immense a political fete which passed off more peacefully. Even the bitterest political opponents of the party to which the organization belongs could not but confess how beautiful the scene was.

"Standing at midnight in Broadway, near the corner of Tenth Street, and looking up toward Union Place, you saw the entire street sheeted with flickering light, and Union Place bright with showers of fireworks; while down town, as far as the New York Hotel, and beyond, there was the same blazing torrent of life and enthusiasm, from which, in profuse and incessant explosion, burst the Roman candles of every celestial hue."

Herbert R. Collins, in his 44 page pamphlet *Political Campaign Torches*, Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (1964) has identified nine different tin torches used in the 1860 Presidential campaign, and three different tin lanterns used in 1864. Four of the 1860 torches were mounted on swivels while three of the four featured a ring to form a revolving and oscillating frame. One of the torches identified by Collins bears the slogan "Hurrah for Lincoln." The remaining torches are designated as "rifle," "platform," "eagle" and "fireman's." The torches with the exception of the one designated "rifle" were, of course, attached to long poles.

Very few of the campaign torches that appear in museums and collections today are marked with any type of identification, and only a very few were patented. With the hundreds of thousands of torches used in the many political campaigns it is surprising that so few have survived.



Grand procession of Wide Awakes at New York City on the evening of October 3, 1860 from *Harper's Weekly*, October 13, 1860. As this is a drawing, the artist depicted all of the torches to be alike. A photograph of the same scene would likely have revealed many different types of torches. This drawing was made when the Wide Awakes marched along News paper Row as the Tribune and Times buildings are depicted along with the City Hall Park at the right of the picture.

The Republican marching clubs, called the Wide Awakes, formed parades carrying mineral oil torches. The men wore oilcloth capes and glazed caps to protect their clothes from the dripping oil. The cheering, singing of campaign songs, and the torchlight processions were very effective in the election of Abraham Lincoln.

The Wide Awakes political token was one of the earliest medals struck for the 1860 campaign and was in honor of the Hartford Corps of Wide Awakes, the first to be organized and the model for all the later groups.

"The unique feature of the canvass was the 'wide awake' organization," wrote Arthur C. Cole. "The idea was immediately taken up throughout the state until every village and hamlet had its 'wide awakes,' composed largely of young men, some under voting age. Shortly after nightfall one 'hears the strains of martial music, and beholds a large body of men, bearing blazing torches, and marching in fine military order. Each man bears a thin rail, surmounted with a large swinging lamp and a small American flag, bearing the names of Lincoln and Hamlin. The uniform (cost: 75 cents) of the privates is a black enamelled circular cape, quite full and of good length, and a glazed military fatigue cap, with a brass or silver eagle in front. Some companies are uniformed with blue, red, drab and silver gray caps and capes, and relieve the monotony of the darker."

From APIC Keynoter

